

Hello Madam chair and members of the committee. I am Diana Slater from Great Falls. On October 17, 2005 I received the call all parents pray they will never get. A neurosurgeon, Dr Hollis, explained that my 16 year old son, Dustin, had been involved in a terrible car accident. He had a severe head injury and he needed my verbal permission right away to put a meter in his head to track the swelling of his brain. He told me to come right down to the ER room, but not to drive myself.

Dustin had multiple face fractures, his collar bone broke in two places, fractured ribs, and his lungs and spleen were badly damaged. He also had a severe Traumatic Brain Injury, he was still under the care of a Dr. for a mild brain injury he sustained in December 2004 in wrestling. They had very little hope for Dusty to pull through. He was in a coma for 6 weeks, the first three on a respirator. The case manager at the hospital in Kalispell told me that I would be referred to Resource Facilitation Service.

Against most advice, I didn't return to work, instead I stayed with Dusty around the clock. I read to him, sang to him, held his hand and told him over and over how much we all loved him and not to be afraid, that everything would be ok. Dustin had reconstructive surgery on his face and right eye socket and had a trach and feeding tube put in.

At six weeks after the accident Dusty was able to open his eyes but was not able to anything he was asked to do. The medical profession thought that it was a high probability that Dusty would always be like this, semi-vegetative and bed ridden. So on November 29, 2005 Dusty and I were transferred by ambulance from Kalispell to a nursing home in Great Falls. (Friends and family had already packed up our belongings and taken my 10 yr old son, Devin, to his Grandpas house in Great Falls.) Just pass East Glacier, Dustin said "Mom, where are we?" I kept talking to him and he calmed down for the rest of the ambulance trip. That evening Dustin crawled a few feet over to where I was sitting. We stayed at the nursing home for six weeks.

January 1, 2006 Dusty was transferred to Benefis Hospital Rehab. At this time Dusty walked (paced) basically from 8 am to 8 pm with a few breaks for meals. All he wanted to do was walk. He had a very short attention span and was easily agitated and frustrated. A number of medications were being added all of the time. None of them seemed to help. The case manager had me sign a release so she could refer me to Resource Facilitation Services. I was given my very first packet of information concerning Traumatic Brain Injury and was given information on the monthly Brain Injury support group. Dustin's agitation was increasing but we had good luck on outings to see the family. When at Grandpa's house he was calm and would sit and relax or visit with family. He was deemed unable/unwilling to participate in therapy so he released to go home with me to our new apartment in Great Falls after nine weeks in rehab. We were sent home with basically little help, no outpatient therapy. We were able to get help through Medicaid waiver and were given aides to help out throughout the day.

Dustin's frustration and agitation continued. The aides we had tried very hard to help, but with no brain injury training some of them only caused more problems. He was

yelled at when he would start getting loud, he would be grabbed when he was doing something they didn't want him to do. Medications were still being increased with little results.

July 2006 Dusty and I drove to Missoula for a two week evaluation at Community Bridges. After almost one week it was decided that Dusty was not ready for this program yet. Dusty had to have supervision(close) at all times due to his unpredictability and chances of him taking off walking. Bridges sent us home with information for me to read and a list of things the aides needed to do or not do concerning Dustin. They stated that all aides and myself need to go through mante training. No training was ever given and by August we were out of aides. My brother-in-law, Dennis, quit his job and was hired by the agency in charge of our aides. He became Dustin's aide. Even with Dennis's help Dustin's agitation and frustration were still increasing along with his stubborn refusal to do required things, like showers and school. We needed help and no one could find any answers.

August 2006 I was contacted by Resource Facilitation Service. They had received a referral from Community Bridges. I had just found Texas NeuroRehab Center in Austin Texas. They deal with Traumatic Brain Injury and they also deal with behavior problems. It took two and a half months to get Medicaid approval for this program. Dustin's case managers through Easter Seals, doctors, Nancy from the Medicaid waiver team and Jillian from Max Baucus' office all helped me push this through.

Resource Facilitation Service called me a number of times and helped me get more information. I was able to talk to someone that understood my frustrations and was willing to do anything needed to help. I felt like I was not alone and there is hope and help out there.

Dusty is currently 1900 miles away at Texas NeuroRehab Center in Austin Texas receiving help for his cognitive and behavioral issues.. His younger brother and I had to stay here in Great Falls. Dusty is making slow but steady progress. They believe he will be off of the 24 hr one to one supervision. He is showering daily on his own and attending school at a 8th to 9th grade level. He still has issues, but he is getting the help he needs.

It took me 10 months to find the help available from Resource Facilitators Service. If either one of those first two hospitals had made the referral the first three months things may have been different and Dusty might have received services earlier. We may have been able to stay together as a family through Dustin's rehab, which would have been much easier on all of us.

We have been very blessed with Dustin's recovery. He continues to do things we were told he would never do. We still have a very long journey ahead of us, but now I know where to turn to find help and hope.

Every family member as well as the survivor of a head injury is starting on a long and intense journey. It is lonely, confusing and very frightening. We are told the worse case scenario every time or even worse, we are told that every brain injury is different. Not real helpful. There is help for coping with a brain injury . Resource Facilitation Services is there to help. Everyone should be given the gift of help amd hope that I received from Resource Facilitation Services. I pray that you will be able to help them reach those Montana residents that realy need them.

Thank you for your time.